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technical bulletin

Municipal Technical Advisory Service
Institute for Public Service, The University of Tennessee
In cooperation with the Tennessee Municipal League

October 25, 1977

DISASTER CONTROL FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES*

The very nature of a correctional facility makes it particularly vulnerable to disaster because of restrictions placed on prisoners for their own safety. So that their welfare and that of any visitors is better protected, a written disaster plan should be formulated. Following is a list of specific elements of such a plan and a discussion of its implementation.

Step 1. Determine what could occur that would constitute need for emergency action, i.e., fire, tornado, riot, jail break, flood. Consult with local fire departments and emergency groups for aid.

Step 2. List step by step what action should be taken to control such an emergency. For example:

A. Internal Disaster - Fire or Explosion

1. Turn in the Alarm or Call Fire Department

In the event of a faulty alarm or phone a alternate plan should be given-- police radio, send fellow officer or trustee, etc. In no case should the jailer or presiding officer leave the facility to go for help unless in his judgment his own life is in total jeopardy and he is helpless to aid the inmates.

2. Evacuate Prisoners

The written plan must include specific instructions such as the location of spare keys and each specific step. For example:

1. Unlock access door to exercise yard.
2. Unlock cell doors of those nearest the hazard and instruct them to assemble outside. Continue until all prisoners are evacuated. (Additional set of keys is located in the lower right hand drawer of the dispatchers desk.)
3. Maintain watch of prisoners from outside exercise yard. Be prepared to evacuate this area if the hazard threatens.
4. (Continue on until satisfied that adequate instructions and guidance have been given.)

Step 3. Prepare an Emergency Call List. One should be provided at the jail and one at the fire department. This list should first include the names of key people in the department, i.e., the sheriff or police chief, assistants, and then finally a complete list of department officers who would necessarily respond to such an emergency. Each department member should have such a list at his residence so that if required,

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* Prepared by the Engineering Department, Tennessee Local Govt. Insurance Plan

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he could notify all others. For example, perhaps the third man notified could be designated to call the remainder of the list while the first two immediately respond to the emergency.

Also to be notified would be the State Police, an ambulance service or any others thought necessary. Other than placing the first call to the fire department, proper agency, or official (depending on the type of disaster), a single officer present should not spend more time than required for one call if the building must be evacuated. In an emergency, there might not be time for even this call. A decision to evacuate should not be delayed in an attempt to control the emergency. Once occupants are safely outside, a judgment can be made whether or not to fight the hazard. Since evacuation is paramount and time consuming, action should be immediate.

Step 4. If your facility is large or complex, it might be necessary to diagram escape routes and post them, along with brief emergency instructions, in visitor areas and at points where the inmates can familiarize themselves with these plans. Some law enforcement people feel that any such prearranged plan given to prisoners would encourage them to devise an escape plan centered upon the certainty of what will take place and the expected weak security which often attends emergencies.

If a decision is made to provide posted information and diagrams, several methods may be used, such as color codes, letter, or numerical designation as to which sections will use which escape routes. Your local fire department and school system should be able to help with this and other aspects of forming a disaster plan.

Discussion

The formulation of a written plan must take into consideration any likely turn of events and attempt to give at least preliminary steps and suggestions for dealing with them. For example: If damage to the facility is such that inmates cannot be returned, what then? If inmates must be evacuated from the exercise yard, how can this be safely accomplished with a minimum risk of escape? What if emergency is at night?

Initial written plans will likely need frequent revision as your program gets underway. As questions are asked and suggestions are offered, inadequacies and excesses will become evident. Plans should be introduced and regularly reviewed at department meetings until an adequate program is developed. The department head should review the established plan at least once per year thereafter to make needed revisions and to insure that the plan is current.

All department members, local emergency squads, fire departments, state police and any others who might respond to an emergency should be supplied with a copy of the plan. Representatives of these groups should be invited to attend a meeting or practice drill so they can become familiar with your facility and discuss their functions in the event of an emergency.

A regular inspection of your facility will be necessary to determine if any unsafe conditions exist. The use of a checklist is important to insure that adequate inspections are made. Request the local fire department to attend one of these inspections and make their own evaluation of existing conditions. You might also ask the fire department to instruct members of your department in the proper use of portable extinguishers and other equipment, and how to fight a fire until help arrives.

The nature of your operation makes any emergency situation more difficult than most. You can likely add improvements to, or disagree with some of the suggestions contained herein. However, I'm sure you agree that a disaster plan is essential and should be instituted as soon as possible. Any comments or suggestions will be appreciated. Please address them to: Gary Cobb, Loss Control Engineer, Corroon & Black, 301 Plus Park Blvd., Nashville 37202.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITY
SAFETY INSPECTION CHECKLIST

Facility: _____ Date: _____

Inspected By: _____

Sidewalks, Steps, Parking Areas

	YES	NO	N/A
1. Are all areas free of conditions which might cause slips or falls? (holes, broken steps or walks, litter)	()	()	()
2. Is there adequate exterior light at night?	()	()	()
3. Are all steps and ramps provided with securely fastened railings?	()	()	()

Exits

1. Are all exits:			
a. Free of obstructions and readily accessible?	()	()	()
b. Properly marked as emergency exits where required?	()	()	()
2. Are all exit doors:			
a. Arranged to open outwards?	()	()	()
b. Easily unlocked and opened?	()	()	()
c. Provided with accessible keys (including spare set)?	()	()	()

Stairs and Doors

1. Are all stairs covered with anti-slip surfaces?	()	()	()
2. Are all handrails securely fastened?	()	()	()
3. Are all stairway doors kept closed when not in use?	()	()	()

Elevators

1. Are elevators maintained and serviced on a regular basis?	()	()	()
Date: _____			

Visitors and Public Areas

1. Are floors free of slip and trip hazards?	()	()	()
2. Are concession machines properly grounded?	()	()	()
3. Is furniture stable and in good repair?	()	()	()

Housekeeping

1. Are adequate ash trays and covered receptacles provided?	()	()	()
2. Is combustible trash and rubbish:			
a. Stored in covered metal containers?	()	()	()
b. Disposed of frequently and not accumulated?	()	()	()
3. Are storage rooms neat and orderly?	()	()	()

4. Are only non-flammable cleaning fluids used?	YES ()	NO ()	N/A ()
5. Are all closets free of oily mops and excessive combustibles?	()	()	()
6. Are all public areas checked for fire hazards after visiting hours?	()	()	()

Heat, Light, Power and Appliances

1. Is all heating and air conditioning equipment cleaned and serviced at least annually by a competent contractor? Date: _____	()	()	()
2. Are all heating, air conditioning and electrical rooms free of combustible storage?	()	()	()
3. Are there indications of frequent electrical problems, replaced fuses and/or resetting of circuit breakers, or overheated fuse or junction boxes?	()	()	()
4. Are covers to electrical boxes in place?	()	()	()
5. Are electrical extension and appliance cords approved and in good condition?	()	()	()
6. Are multiple outlet extension plugs allowed or is there excessive use of extension cords?	()	()	()
7. Are all appliances properly grounded?	()	()	()
8. Has the electrical system been checked by a code electrician in the past year? Date: _____	()	()	()

Kitchens

1. Are hoods, ducts, ovens, range filters and grease traps:			
a. Cleaned on a regular schedule?	()	()	()
b. Cleaned professionally at least once annually according to usage?	()	()	()
2. Is the automatic fire extinguishing system inspected and maintained by contract?	()	()	()
3. Are kitchen, food preparation and storage areas kept clean and free from possible contaminants?	()	()	()

Fire Protection

1. Are all fire extinguishers:			
a. Serviced annually and tagged with date of last service?	()	()	()
b. Hung within 75 feet of any point on each floor and easily accessible when possible?	()	()	()
2. Are periodic tests and inspections made of fire detection alarm and sprinkler systems to insure proper operation? Dates: _____	()	()	()
3. Are the fire department, hospital, and other emergency numbers posted conspicuously and have emergency instructions been given to all employees?	()	()	()

- | | YES | NO | N/A |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| 4. Is at least 18 inches maintained between storage or furnishings and sprinkler heads? () | () | () | () |
| 5. Is padding and bunk mats in cells constructed of approved fire retardant materials? () | () | () | () |

Disaster Plan

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. Have all employees: | | | |
| a. Been given a copy of the disaster plan and is it periodically reviewed by them? () | () | () | () |
| b. Been instructed in the use of fire fighting equipment? () | () | () | () |
| 2. Is a copy of the disaster plan available to those on duty? () | () | () | () |
| 3. Are emergency evacuation drills performed regularly? (Drills need not require actual removal of inmates if security would be threatened.) () | () | () | () |
| 4. Are diagrams of evacuation routes posted at appropriate locations? () | () | () | () |
| 5. Is the disaster plan reviewed annually and revisions made? () | () | () | () |
| 6. Is the emergency call list kept current? () | () | () | () |

Municipal Technical Advisory Service
The University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37916

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